

IN THE CLAIMS:

6. (Three Times Amended) A process for producing hot-rolled steel strip from a continuously cast precursor strip, comprising the steps of:

3D
3/1
receiving, at a first deformation stage having at least one roll stand, the continuous precursor strip of a complete casting sequence directly from a continuous casting plant in which the continuous precursor strip is produced;

rolling the continuous precursor strip through the first deformation stage to form a continuous intermediate strip;

coiling the continuous intermediate strip without subjecting said continuous intermediate strip to any cutting to form an intermediate coil having an intermediate coil weight comprising at least 40 tons;

uncoiling the continuous intermediate strip from the intermediate coil to supply a second deformation stage having at least one roll stand;

rolling the continuous intermediate strip through the second deformation stage to form a finished strip;

producing a plurality of finished coils from the finished strip by coiling the finished strip and severing the finished strip into sections having a desired finished coil weight after said step of rolling the continuous intermediate strip through the second deformation stage; and

changing the metallurgical characteristics of the continuous intermediate strip and said step of rolling the continuous intermediate strip through the second deformation stage.

10. (Twice Amended) The process of claim 6, wherein said step of changing the metallurgical characteristics comprises using a flexible speed control.